INTERNATIONAL
CENTRE FOR
ETHNIC STUDIES

ICES Research Paper

FRACTURING COMMUNITY

Intra-group relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka

MOHAMED FASLAN & NADINE VANNIASINKAM

Fracturing Community

Intra-group Relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka

Mohamed Faslan and Nadine Vanniasinkam

International Centre for Ethnic Studies

November 2015

© 2015 International Centre for Ethnic Studies
2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 08
Sri Lanka
E-mail: admin@ices.lk
URL: www.ices.lk

ISBN 978-955-580-169-0

This research paper was commissioned as part of the Building Resilient Communities initiative implemented by ICES with support from USAID.

Cover Artwork by Mohamed Kedhr

ICES Research Papers:

1. The Transition to Civilian Life of Teenage Girls and Young Women Ex-Combatants: A Case Study from Batticaloa (June, 2012) by Sonny Inbaraj Krishnan. Research Paper No: 1.

2. Producing the Present: History as Heritage in Post-War Patriotic Sri Lanka (July, 2012) by Nira Wickramasinghe. Research Paper No: 2.

3. Reconciling What? History, Realism and the Problem of an Inclusive Sri Lankan Identity (August, 2012) by Harshana Rabukwella. Research Paper No: 3.

4. The Promise of the LLRC: Women's Testimony and Justice in post- war Sri Lanka (February, 2013) by Neloufer de Mel. Research Paper No: 4.

5. A Provisional Evaluation of the Contribution of the Supreme Court to Political Reconciliation in Post- War Sri Lanka (May 2009- August 2012) (March, 2013) by Dinesha Samararatne. Research Paper No: 5.

6. Victorious Victims: An Analysis of Sri Lanka's Post- War Reconciliation Discourse (March, 2013) by Andi Schubert. Research Paper No: 6.

7. The Political Economy of Post – War Sri Lanka (May, 2013) by Sunil Bastian. Research Paper No: 7.

8. 'Post-War Sri Lanka: Is Peace a Hostage of the Military Victory? Dilemmas of Reconciliation, Ethnic Cohesion and Peace- Building (June, 2013) by Gamini Keerawella, Research Paper No: 8.

9. 'History' After the War: Historical Consciousness in the Collective Sinhala – Buddhist Psyche in Post-War Sri Lanka (July, 2013) by Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri. Research Paper No: 9.

10. 'What Lessons Are We Talking About? Reconciliation and Memory in Post- Civil War Sri Lankan Cinema (August, 2013) by Dinidu Karunanayake and Thiyagaraja Waradas. Research Paper No: 10.

11. 'A History of Tamil Diaspora Politics In Canada: Organisational Dynamics and Negotiated Order, 1978- 2013 (November, 2013) by Amaranath Amarasingam. Research Paper No: 11.

12. 'Contextualizing Post-War Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: The Political Economy of Territorial Control in Historical Perspective (June, 2014) by Charan Rainford. Research Paper No: 11.

13. 'Competing For Victimhood Status: Northern Muslims And The Ironies Of Post- War Reconciliation, Justice And Development (July, 2014) by Farzana Haniffa. Research Paper No: 13.

14. Ethical Reconstruction? Primitive Accumulation in the Apparel Sector of Eastern Sri Lanka (October, 2014) by Annelies Goger and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura Research Paper No: 14.

15. Self, religion, identity and politics: Buddhist and Muslim encounters in contemporary Sri Lanka (November, 2015) by Dhammika Herath and Harshana Rambukwella.

Fracturing Community

Intra-group Relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka

Mohamed Faslan and Nadine Vanniasinkam*

Mohamed Faslan is a programme officer for the project Building Resilient Communities at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. He has also been a visiting lecturer in Political Science at the University of Colombo since 2009. He has a MA and BA (Hons) in Political Science from the University of Colombo. He has almost eight years' experience working in the field of peace and conflict resolution, human rights and media.

Nadine Vanniasinkam is a programme officer at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies and works on an initiative that promotes inter-religious coexistence in Sri Lanka. She is also a visiting lecturer at the Post Graduate Institute of English at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Nadine has a BA (Hons) in English Literature from the University of Colombo, a LLB and a MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Melbourne.

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to all the interviewees from Batticaloa, Ampara, Puttlam and Colombo for graciously welcoming us into their homes/workplaces and devoting several hours for discussion. Our special thanks are also due to friends in Batticaloa for coordinating interviews and ensuring that we met representatives of all the different Muslim groups in these locations.

We also express our thanks to our colleagues at ICES for their feedback and constant support and to Samsath Begum who helped us with transcribing the lengthy interviews.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACJU	All Ceylon Jammiyathul Ulama
ACTJ	All Ceylon Thawheed Jamath
BBS	Bodu Bala Sena
CIS	Centre for Islamic Studies
IIRO	International Islamic Relief Organisation
IRO	Islamic Research Organisation
JASM	Jamathul Ansari Sunnathul Muslimeen
MC	Muslim Council
MFCD	Muslim Foundation for Culture and Development
NSC	National Shoora Council
NTJ	National Thawheed Jamath
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLTJ	Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamath
SMT	Social Movement Theory
TNTJ	Tamil Nadu Thawheed Jamath

Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Theoretical Framework 4

3. Scope and Methodology 6

4. The Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka – A Historical Perspective 8

5. The Splintering of the Muslim Community of Sri Lanka 12

6. Religion as Political Opportunity to Mobilise 13

7. Islamic Reformist Movements in Sri Lanka 15

8. The Politics of Factionalism 23

9. The Economics of Factionalism 25

10. Implications of Intra-Group Fragmentation 27

11. Conclusion 29

Fracturing Community: Intra-group Relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka

Religion is a socio-political construct which is characterised by dissent and diversity on the basis of theological interpretation, religious practice and administration. These differences may sometimes peacefully coexist, but most often can cause intra-religious tensions leading to conflict. Islam is no exception as it is characterised by pluralism where interpretation, practice and governance vary across regions, nations and communities. In Sri Lanka, the minority Muslim community is largely considered (by the majority communities) as a religiously homogeneous group when, in fact, they are splintered into various denominations which espouse different interpretations of Islam, values and practices. This ignorance of the plurality within the Muslim community and its internal politics could be a contributing factor to much of the prejudices held by individuals against the community.

In recent times, difference has been a source of conflict among certain Muslim groups in Sri Lanka, resulting in public clashes and sometimes even leading to death. Furthermore, the ‘performance’ of difference among Muslim groups, visible in the form of jubbas, hijabs, niqabs, beards and the increasing number of mosques, has created an illusion of an increase in the Muslim population, adding to the fear and suspicion of the majority towards the motives of the Muslim community and its ‘repressive’ culture. These individual prejudices have in turn been manipulated by extremist nationalist groups like the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) to incite hatred towards and violence against the Muslim community.

Historically, the Muslims have faced violence from both the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Anti-Muslim violence dates back to the 1900s, the earliest recorded being the riots in 1915 which was spurred by Buddhist ethno-nationalist fears of Muslims’ business prowess (International Crisis Group 2007; Nuhuman 2002). In 1976, clashes between Sinhalese and Muslims over jobs and land resulted in the shooting of several Muslims in Puttalam. Muslims were brutally evacuated from the North and North-East by the LTTE in 1990. In 1999, Muslim shops in Nochchiyagama were attacked (among other small incidents), in 2001 Muslims in Mawanella were attacked by a Sinhalese mob resulting in the death of two Muslims and damage to vehicles and property and in 2006 Muslim shops were burnt in Aluthgama. In a brutal reenactment of the 1915 riot 100 years ago, Muslims of Aluthgama were again targeted by Buddhist extremists in 2014 resulting in death and damage to

property. Many sporadic small-scale clashes have also taken place between these periods, but this information needs to be recorded in a single document and made accessible.

Despite the obvious political backing and the "ethno-nationalist rivalries" (McGilvray 2011) of extremist Buddhist nationalists being behind most of the major incidents of violence against Muslims, it remains a fact that a majority of Sinhalese and Tamil communities harbour prejudices and misconceptions about the Muslim community, and this contributes to the ease with which hate speech, false accusations and 'myths' about Muslims are spread and accepted as 'truth'. In fact, even the 1915 riot is attributed to the myths or rumours about Muslims that were planted, embellished and disseminated throughout the country and easily believed by the masses (Kannangara 1984).

Today, much of society's prejudices stem from the Muslim community's increased use of the religious identity markers mentioned above. Linked to this is the increasing number of new mosques and the attendant fear that Muslims, by increasing their numbers, are conspiring to overthrow the Sinhala Buddhist majority. While this illusion of the increase of Muslims in Sri Lanka can be attributed to the global narrative of Islamaphobia, it can also be the result of what McGilvray (2011) observes as the "sharp internal conflicts" regarding the practice of Islam among the Muslims of Sri Lanka which are visually characterised by symbolic 'Islamisation' or 'self-othering' among certain Muslim groups, primarily in the form of Arabic dress, erection of new mosques and clashing publicly over internal theological disputes. It is this that has made Muslims more 'visible' (McGilvray 2011) whereby their 'new' 'presence' is viewed with fear and suspicion.

This study also upholds the view that much of these misconceptions are due to the largely private nature of Muslim communities whereby others are ignorant of the practices and beliefs which dictate their lifestyles. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explain this 'visibility' (mentioned above) and to explore what exactly is happening within the Muslim community. The assumption is that the 'new' presence of and factionalism among Muslims in Sri Lanka is due to a (long-standing) Islamic revival characterised by disputes regarding the practice of Islam.

Few studies have been conducted on the intra-religious dynamics of Muslim groups in Sri Lanka and almost all of them have situated the Muslim minority within the context of Sri Lanka's 30-year ethnic conflict and in relation to their Tamil and Sinhalese majorities

(Spencer et al. 2015). The Muslim identity in Sri Lanka has also been a subject of several studies primarily from a historical and anthropological perspective. Muslim scholars such as Nuhuman (2004) and Shukri (1986) and Indian and local scholars such as Mohan (1987) and Samaraweera (1986) have conducted macro analyses tracing the history of Muslims in Sri Lanka and commenting on the identity of this community in relation to its larger socio-political others. Over the past two decades, anthropologists Dennis McGilvray and Bart Klem have engaged in micro analyses of individual Muslim communities, particularly in the East, and their relationship with their immediate other – the Tamils – and how the ethnic conflict impacted the Muslim identity. Haniffa (2013) has also examined the practices of a reformist Muslim women's group in Colombo. While this body of literature provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the history and identity of Muslims in Sri Lanka, little (except for Spencer et al., Bart Klem's and Dennis McGilvray's anthropological studies in the East) has been written about relations within the Muslim community.

While acknowledging the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the Muslim identity and the Tamil and Sinhalese majority identities, this paper posits the argument that, in post-conflict Sri Lanka, the Tamils of the North and East and the Sinhalese majority are no longer the sole 'others' of the Muslim community. The increase in different groups and sub-groups within the Muslim community since the 1950s has resulted in the splintering of the Muslim community, whereby Muslims have become their own 'other'. This has hitherto been overshadowed by issues of the ethnic conflict.

This paper, therefore, aims to look inward to provide a nuanced framework of the dynamics of intra-group relations within the Muslim community and the problems attendant to such divisions. The study maps the different groups present among the Muslim community, the basis on which they emerge, the dynamics between them and factors that instigate conflict and/or promote solidarity among them. Furthermore, while this paper is primarily addressed to non-Muslims for a better understanding of the Muslim community, it is also hoped that the paper will function as a document to generate intra- as well as inter-community dialogue and inform policy within Muslim governing institutions. It must also be noted that due to constraints of time and resources, the paper limits itself to the analysis of Muslims in a micro sense. In Sri Lanka, the word Muslim is an overarching term used by non-Muslims to refer collectively to Muslims, Malays, Borahs and Memons. This paper limits its focus to the Muslim community of Sri Lanka in its micro sense and intends to dissect and examine its many parts.

The researchers also wish to emphasise the fact that intra-religious conflict is not new to Sri Lanka or the world. The Christian community in Sri Lanka is fragmented into several denominations which have their own politics and internal disagreements. Similarly, the Buddhist and Hindu communities, though not divided, vary regionally in terms of worship and cult worship (Obeyesekera 1990). Our interest in intra-Muslim relations, therefore, should not be misconstrued as singling out the Muslim community as the only group fraught with internal tensions. It is the manipulation of these tensions for political interests by extremist groups, further fuelled by the international prevalence of Islamaphobia, which has prompted interest in this area.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the intra-group relations among the Muslim community, this paper approaches the various Islamic groups in Sri Lanka through the lens of Social Movement Theory (SMT) whereby each group is considered a movement aimed at effecting (social/individual) change. A Social Movement is defined as being driven by "rational motives" (Bayat 2005) and structurally composed of "leadership, administrative structure, incentives for participation and a means for acquiring resources and support" (Davis et al. 2005). A distinction is often made between movements that mobilise religion to create social/political change and religious groups that intend to effect change within a particular religious community and increase its adherents; the former is known as a Social Movement and the latter, a Religious Movement (Williams 2003). Most Islamic groups in Sri Lanka constitute religious movements, though some can be Religio-social Movements as will be discussed in the body of the study. Nevertheless, social and religious movements in general "need to organise [themselves], to allow coordinated activity and continuation over time; [they] need to generate a movement culture, including persuasive ideological claims; and […] need to negotiate successfully the social environment, including taking advantage of the opportunities available" (Williams 2003, p. 316). In other words, when studying the emergence, development and practice of social movements it is necessary to examine the *mobilising structures*, *political opportunities* and *framing processes* that influence group mobilisation (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996 – cited in McAdam and Scott, 2005). According to McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996):

> Mobilising structures are "the forms of organization (informal as well as formal), available …" and include "meso-level groups, organizations, and informal networks that comprise the collective building blocks of social networks." Political opportunities highlight the "nexus between the structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement from institutionalized politics, and social movements that arise to challenge and reform existing systems". Framing processes is the "collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action. It focuses on how symbolic elements mediate between structural parameters and the social actors who collectively interpret their situation and devise remedies and proposed lines of action." (p.16)

The above also suggests that a social movement is a process that needs to be studied as a historical phenomenon in a span of time (Bayat 2005, p. 897), whereby it is necessary to locate social movements within their historical/political context. An analysis of Islamic movements in Sri Lanka, therefore, cannot be achieved without consideration of the historical trajectory of the Muslim identity in Sri Lanka. As the second minority community in Sri Lanka, Muslims have been preoccupied with their identity which has varied historically in relation to socio-political incentives. Identity, in this sense is fluid and relational, whereby it is pivoted on various factors such as ethnic consciousness, religious ideology, language, caste, class, economics, politics and region. For the Muslim identity, these factors have mattered in different degrees at different points of time in history. It is important to note, however, that, at a macro institutional level as well as micro sub-group level the Muslim identity is constructed and "transformed by particular elites [the process of which] invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits, and social status between competing elite, class and leadership groups both within and among ethnic categories" (Brass, 1991 cited in Nuhuman 2007, p. 4). It is these aspects that the paper intends to unveil in its examination of Muslim sub-groups and institutions i.e. the micro-identity dynamics which are constructed by the intersection of shared experiences at local level (de Munck 1998). However, in order to understand the subtleties, it is necessary to briefly examine the macro identity of Muslims in Sri Lanka which is shaped by elite leaders and organisations (de Munck 1998, p. 111).

Thus, remembering that the macro and micro inform each other, the paper will commence with a brief critical overview of the larger historical process of the Muslim identity and group formation in Sri Lanka before proceeding to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the different Islamic groups in Sri Lanka? What is their composition and how do they interact? (mobilising structures)
2. Why/have Muslims begun to further differentiate themselves from the rest of the communities in Sri Lanka? (political opportunities)
    a. Is factionalism among the Muslim community a sign of growth in religiosity? What has triggered this growth?
    b. What are the political or economic reasons for factionalism among the Muslim community?
    c. Do any external/international forces contribute to factionalism?
    d. What factors affect intra-group conflict?
3. How do different Muslim groups define/rationalise the need for/legitimacy of their group? What subject positions do they adopt? (framing processes)

Scope and Methodology

The Muslims of Sri Lanka consist of five ethnic groups – Sri Lankan Moors, Coastal/Indian Moors, Malays, Borahs and Memons (Nuhuman 2007, p.17). However, in this study, the focus is not on these traditional ethnic groups which comprise the Muslim community, but the new religious groups that emerged post-independence.

In keeping with the aim of understanding the dynamics of interaction between different Islamic groups and institutions in Sri Lanka, the research draws from three context mapping workshops conducted in Ampara, Galle and Colombo with representatives of the Muslim community in 2014, five group discussions and 14 semi-structured interviews (guided by the three research questions) with administrative and religious leaders of different Islamic groups in Ampara, Batticaloa, Puttalam and Colombo. This choice of locations is due to the fact that the largest concentration of Muslims is found in the East, particularly in Kathankudy (Batticaloa) and Akkaraipattu (Ampara) and that the governing institutions of all groups are located in Colombo. Furthermore, the researchers wanted to investigate the accusation, both from within and outside the Muslim community, in the past year that a Jihadist movement is being formed in the East. Interviews in the East directed us to Puttalam where there is a unique group in Ethalai. The researchers were unable to interview another emerging Ahamadiya group in Negombo due to limitations of time and resources. The areas covered by this study are Eravur, Ottamavadi and Kathankudy in Batticaloa, Attalachenai and

Sainthamaruthu in Amapra, Etthalai and Noraicholai in Puttalam and Colombo city. While these locations may not be exhaustive, they represent the ideologies present in areas densely populated by Muslims. Respondents were identified through discussions with Muslim academics, and community leaders in Colombo and Ampara.

Before commencing on the analysis of the data, the researchers feel it necessary to declare their subject positions and process of minimising researcher bias to ensure objectivity in analysing the data. First, it must be stated that the research tool was designed with the understanding that "people create, negotiate and change social meanings through the process of interaction" (Sandstrom et al. 2006 cited in Leavy 2014, p. 86). Since the paper does not focus on 'how' the interviewees constructed their identities, questions were rephrased and repeated to ensure uniformity and reliability of responses. Furthermore, the limitation that an individual cannot 'truly' represent a group is also acknowledged. The researchers were also aware that meaning is co-constructed by both the researchers and the interviewee and is also shaped by the researchers' preexisting biases regarding Islam and Muslims as well as the interviewees' perception of the researchers. To avoid such bias, trust was established with the interviewee, by engaging in small talk, channeling interviewees through contacts they are comfortable with and dispelling suspicion that this research topic might harm the Muslim community. It is also fortunate that the researchers themselves compose of an insider (Muslim) and an outsider (Tamil/Catholic) ensuring both an emic and an etic perspective. The data was also analysed with the understanding that within the time span of data collection and analysis (May 2014 – March 2015) several contextual changes, most significantly the Aluthgama riot in June 2014 and the change in political regime in January 2015, might have impacted the stance of the Muslim interviewees and how they represented themselves.

The researchers also wish to mention that their attitudes changed during the process of data collection and the new understandings about different Islamic groups in Sri Lanka led them to question some of the language initially/still used in this paper. It was realised that certain terms that are used can be biased against the Muslim community and thus require elucidation. In the current context of Islamaphobia which is a western construct, adjectives such as 'extremist' and 'radical' used in relation to Muslims connote leanings towards terrorism. In Sri Lanka, the word 'extremist', used by the Muslim community (*thiviravatham* in Tamil) in

reference to different religious groups, does not connote terrorism, but the tendency to be non-conformist or the strict/rigid adherence/promotion of religious practices. Similarly, the use of the word 'radical' in this paper is meant to imply a strong fervour to reform, tempered by emotion which can sometimes lead to violence. The word 'factionalism' also immediately connotes group formation on the basis of conflict, but in the context of our usage is also intended to refer to amicable divisions with potential for conflict. Furthermore, the researchers chose to avoid the Christian (Euro-centric) word 'denomination' and chose the word 'group' instead, which refers to a collection of individuals who believe and propagate a particular interpretation of Islam. An institution on the other hand, refers to either an overarching Islamic governing body in Sri Lanka or an Islamic organisation engaged in work other than the promotion of religion. Though the word 'group' is initially used in the paper to refer to all religious groups in general, a distinction is later made between Islamic movements and Islamic groups. This will be explained in another section of the paper.

The Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka- A Historical Perspective

The Muslim identity in Sri Lanka is multifaceted and has been (re)constructed in interaction with social, political and historical context over time. In Sri Lanka, Muslims are an ethno religious community and the researchers' observation is that they have chosen to declare their religious identity over their ethnic identity and vice versa at different points in time according to certain material, social and political benefits they required. In other words, their subjectivity has undergone many 'framing processes' whereby the Muslims of Sri Lanka have interpreted their identity and attributed it to the socio-economic and political climate of the time.

The Sri Lankan Muslims, like the coastal Muslims of south India, are mixed-race descendants of Arab and Persian sea-faring merchants who have long traversed the Indian Ocean between the Middle East and South-East Asia (McGilvray 2011). The spread of Islam in Sri Lanka was a product of Arab trade whereby Muslim traders, who by reason of their long stay, intermarried with the local families and settled in the country (Shukri 1986). Therefore, it is clear that the Sri Lankan Muslims are not alien to this country as they have blood relationships with other communities. The Arabic language and Islam are what distinguished them and characterised their identity in Sri Lanka during the 9th and 10th centuries (Shukri 1986). In the 13th century, Muslims became more influential in trade and carried out their

trade through various ports in the island which also shaped their settlement in coastal areas. Later, Muslims also played very influential roles as advisers on foreign trade to the Sinhalese Kings.

In the 13th and 15th centuries, the Arab world established a strong relationship with traders of South Indian coastlines such as the Malabar. This expansion of maritime activities with India not only increased South Indian Muslims' trade, but also led to new settlements in Sri Lanka as the South Indian Muslims favoured Sri Lanka's strategic location for engaging in business with the world. These settlements of South Indian traders and the concomitant expansion of trade relations with India also impacted the culture and identity of Sri Lankan Muslims who relied heavily on trade with South Indian Muslims (Shukri 1986). This interaction added a new dimension to the identity of the Muslims of Sri Lanka transforming them from Arab into Indo-Arab. This was also reflected in the linguistic identity of Muslims in Sri Lanka by the emergence of Arabic Tamil among Muslims (Shukri 1986).

Another transformation of the identity of Muslims occurred during the colonial rule of the Portuguese and Dutch where Muslims faced much discrimination and lost their business monopoly due to forced migration from coastal areas to eastern parts of the country. As a result Muslims lost their connection with Arabs entirely and had to depend on South India for cultural and religious affiliations. This brought forth a new form of religion and language and contributed immensely to the spread of Indian Sufi ideology/Sufism in Sri Lanka (Samaraweera 1986; Shukri 1986).

The British rule, on the other hand, was favourable to the Sri Lankan Muslims whereby they were granted freedom to engage in their trade and religious practices as Muslim trade activities helped the British colonial trade as well. Thus, Muslims benefited more than the Sinhalese in the field of business, which was also due to the divide and rule policy of the British. This led to anti-Muslim riots in 1915 where the British, who opposed Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, took the side of the victimised Muslims and controlled the riots by brutally killing perpetrators as well as innocent civilians (Smaraweera 1986).

By the time of British rule, the settlement pattern of the Muslims in Sri Lanka had become well established (Samaraweera 1986). However, the Muslim community did not have a religious or political leader like the Buddhists or Hindus This triggered a revivalist

movement among Muslims in Sri Lanka. . In the absence of a leader, charismatic Arabi Pasha from Egypt filled this gap and was appointed leader of Muslims by virtue of being an Arab. He became a leading activist among Muslims in Sri Lanka during his period (1883 – 1901) in the island (Samraweera 1986). During this time the revivalist movement's primary focus was education of Muslims in Sri Lanka as Muslims were not educated like members of other communities. Education had hitherto been unattractive to Muslims as opposed to other ethnic groups due to some suspicious religious belief that the Christian missionary education system was 'alien'[1] to Islam. Sidde Lebbe was the first Muslim Proctor in Sri Lanka and he joined Arabi Pasha's revivalist movement. This Muslim education movement initiated English language education in Arabic Schools (Madrasas) and established Muslim girls' schools. Apart from education, this movement had also begun newspapers for Muslims such as Ceylon Mohammedan (English) and Muslim Naisan (Tamil).

Education and journalism increased awareness among Muslims about politics and identity. This was evident when Sidde Lebbe with his companion I.L.M Abdul Azeez formed the first Islamic organisation in Sri Lanka which was called *Jammiyathul Islamiya* (Nuhman 2007). The primary objective of this organisation was to promote Islamic awareness among Muslims on maintaining a distinct Muslim political and social identity (Ameen as cited in Nuhman 2007). However, it was only after Ponnamabalam Ramanathan's statement that Sri Lankan Muslims could be traced to South India and were in fact Dravidians who had been converted to Islam that Muslims engaged in an active political struggle to establish their unique identity (Mohan 1987, Smaraweera 1987). I.L.M Abdul Azeez criticised Ponnambalam's statement and explained the Muslim identity's connection to Islam and the Arab world. He emphasised that even though Muslims speak Tamil as a language and adopt some Tamil cultural practices, they are different on the basis of religion. This identification on religious lines is typical of minority communities which uphold religion to safeguard its distinct identity (Mohan 1987, p. 5). It was also inspired by the global narrative of pan Arabism among Muslims at the time and emerged not only in Sri Lanka, but also in other parts of the world. Thus, Islam has become the fundamental base for the local as well as global positioning of the Sri Lankan Muslim existence whereby without Islam there is no Muslim (Nuhman 2004). Pan-Arabism also marked a shift in Sri Lankan Muslims' relationship with Islam which was

[1] The word 'alien' was frequently used by the interviewees to refer to anything or anyone that/who is non-Muslim. Though the Tamil equivalent *anniyan* also is used, the English word is used more often. The different connotations and contexts of use of this word should be studied further.

primarily influenced by South India which represented the Tamil Dravidian identity, whereby Sri Lankan Muslims looked to the Middle East to reshape Islamic practices in Sri Lanka. This could also be considered the beginning of the Sufi - Wahabi conflict which is present even today.

Muslims' modification and purification of their identity on the lines of Islam, led to the need to institutionalise their identity whereby they instituted Muslim personal law and established Quazi Courts to deal with issues of Muslim marriage and divorce. A Government institution to administer mosques and charitable organisations was also established. Furthermore, being a second minority, Muslims also realised the importance of sustaining their religious identity. Separate educational institutes for Muslims such as schools and teacher training colleges which followed a separate calendar to accommodate the Ramazan vacation were thus established (Nuhman 2004).

In addition, Muslims also wanted to have separate political representation as opposed to being merely represented in Tamil political parties. Therefore, Muslim politicians tried to distinguish Muslim politics from Tamil politics and worked alongside Sinhala political parties. They rejected Tamil politics even to the extent of supporting anti-Tamil bills like the 1956 Sinhala only language policies. Another contributing factor for Muslims siding with the Sinhalese is that two thirds of Muslims live in predominantly Sinhala areas (McGilvray 2011). Therefore, historically, to safeguard their interests and identity in politics, Muslim politics has always been very close to the Sinhalese majority rather than the Tamils. Linguistically too, Sinhala became the preferred language of some Muslim youth as well as the medium of instruction in Muslim Arabic colleges (McGilvray 2011).

To conclude, historically, at a macro level, Muslims have framed their political, ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities separately at different points of time, while their emphasis on religious identity has predominantly been constant. However, at a micro level, over time, Muslims were not culturally or linguistically uniform. In the early 1900s "the Muslim community was fragmented by class, lifestyle and regional/local (and perhaps even ethnic) differences" (Shukri 1986, p. 367). Furthermore, despite their common denominator being religion, Shukri (1986) notes that religion did not function as a unifying force as Muslims assimilated to the practices of their neighbouring communities. It could be argued that as a minority community engaged in trade, acceptance within the community they lived alongside

(socially, economically and politically) was incentive for them to assimilate. Thus, from a historical point of view, Muslims were fragmented primarily on regional/geographic differences and based on which majority community (Sinhalese/Tamil) they lived alongside. While this still continues to be the case, post-independence, Muslims began to assert their singular ethnic identity on the basis of religion and reconnected with Islam under the global Ummah, unifying in common as Muslims rather than as Moors and Malays (Ameerdeen 2006; Mohan 1987; Nuhuman 2004).

At the macro level, therefore, the Muslim religious identity was initially ascribed (inherited without critical reflection), chosen (resulting from introspection) during early settlement periods and declared which entails not only introspection and learning about 'correct' practices, but also strengthening and asserting one's religious identity (Peek 2005) in recent crisis moments when the indivisibility of the Muslim ethno-religious identity was questioned. A declaration of one's identity entails various external (in addition to internal) manifestations. Furthermore, deep introspection on and learning of one's religion leads to the rise of various questions regarding the 'correct' interpretation and 'proper' practice of Islam. This manifests through various visible or symbolic identity markers such as the niqab and the emergence of new/dissenting groups, promoting a particular interpretation of Islam. This also leads to the rise and confrontation of different Muslim groups (factionalism); the dynamics of their interaction will be explicated in the following section.

The Splintering of the Muslim Community of Sri Lanka

Having discussed the macro history of the Muslims of Sri Lanka, it is important to examine the impact of these larger political moments on individual communities at local level and how this contributed to the splintering of the Muslim community (factionalism). Bart Klem (2011), in his study of Muslims in Akkaraipattu, notes that despite being victimised by both the Tamil militants and Sinhalese ethno-nationalists and despite their common goal to distinguish themselves from the Tamils, Muslims surprisingly continue to be a heterogeneous and divergent group. He argues that this divergence which characterises the Muslim identity can be clearly explained only by acknowledging the strong interrelationship between the religious, ethnic, economic and political. Boucek (2009) also notes that factionalism is a "dynamic process of subgroup partitioning […] that can transform itself over time in response to incentives" (456). In the language of Social Movement Theory, the formation of

new Muslim groups is triggered by political opportunities at a given point of time. History shows us that these incentives/opportunities for Muslims have been spiritual, cultural, economic and political.

Religion as Political Opportunity to Mobilise

Factionalism among Muslims on religious grounds in Sri Lanka is both horizontal and vertical. On one hand, it is a result of some Muslims choosing, critically evaluating and declaring their religious identity (e.g. Thawheed[2]) in response to moments of crisis, while others hold on to their ascribed religious identities (e.g. Sufis), and on the other, it is a vertical splintering of religious groups into subgroups on minor theological disputes. The research identified several divisions among the Muslim community, some which are regionally specific, but most with networks throughout the island (see Table 1.1 for list of sects and groups). However, these groups could be categorised into nine core groups (horizontal) which have several sub denominations (as illustrated in Table 1).

Table 1: Islamic Groups in Sri Lanka

Traditional	Modern	Isolated Outliers	NGOs
• **Sufis** ○ **Thariqas** (Qadiriyya, Shadhliyya, Rifaiyya, Chisthiyya, Naqshaban diya) ○ **Thakkiyas**	• Thablighi Jamaat • Jamaate Islami • Jamathus Salama • Thawheed ○ JASM (Jamathul Ansari Sunnathul Muslimeen), ○ NTJ (National Thawheed Jamath) ○ SLTJ (Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamath) ○ Dharus Salaf ○ Dharul Adhar ○ ACTJ (All Ceylon Thawheed Jamath)	• Jamathul Muslimeen (Baiyath) • Abrur Rauf group • Payluwan • Shia	• SHABAB • IIRO (International Islamic Relief Organisation) • IRO (Islamic Research Organisation) • CIS (Centre for Islamic Studies) • MFCD (Muslim Foundation for Culture and Development)

[2] As spelled in the Sri Lanka Thawheed website

At this juncture, before examining how religion drives group mobilisation, it is necessary to make a distinction between the use of the word 'movement' and 'group' henceforth in this paper. As stated in the theoretical framework, it is debatable whether the Islamic groups in Sri Lanka constitute Social Movements or Religious Movements. The following sections go into detail describing the motivations and functions of the different Islamic groups in Sri Lanka and the words 'movement' and 'group' are used differently. An examination of the motivation of different Islamic groups (discussed below) reveals that some constitute *Religio-social Movements* (referred to as movements) while others are mere *groups* with no reformative agenda as a driving force. The use of the term Religio-social Movement is due to the fact that while some Islamic groups are geared towards spiritual change within a community, they can also influence politics (most often at micro level) through political patronage. Islamic groups, on the other hand are those that once may have been movements, but now have achieved their desired change and are comfortable being exclusive private communities. However, it must be noted that these groups can also have the influence of political patronage.

There are two main schools of thought in Muslim ideology in Sri Lanka – Sufism and Wahabism. Sufi theology predominated during the colonial period with Thareekas and Thakkiyas being the major religious institutions which promoted the practice of Sufi theology (Sukri 1986; Mohan 1987). As mentioned above, when Muslims began to distinguish their identity based on Islam, they tried to link themselves with the global Ummah (the Arab world) in order to establish a 'true' Muslim identity. This brought them in conflict with the Sufism practiced locally and the orthodox Wahabism practiced in Arab countries and created tensions within the Muslim community in Sri Lanka on religious lines. The interviews conducted with group leaders from Ampara, Batticaloa and Puttalam revealed that factionalism on the basis of religion took form in the 1950s with influences from India and Pakistan, and the Arab world in the late 1970s with the opening of the Economy which enabled Muslim scholars to travel to India, Pakistan and Arab nations. Having lived thus far as an isolated community with no overarching leadership, interacting with global Muslims enabled Sri Lankan Muslims to realise that their Islamic practices and beliefs had embraced Tamil/Sinhalese cultural practices and had a strong Indian Sufi influence as well. This triggered an Islamic revival which involved the purification of Islam and was spearheaded primarily by the Jamatee Islami and the Thablighi Jamaat. Other 'purist' groups, such as the Baiyath group in Puttalam, have imported theologies from countries like India and Pakistan

and formed closed insular communities. Thus, as McGivlray (2011) observes, "During the past decade a sharp internal conflict has arisen within the Sri Lankan community between locally popular Sufi sheiks and the followers of hostile Islamic reformist movements energized by the ideas and resources from the global Ummah, or world community of Muslims" (p. 46). Here, McGilvray's strong use of the word 'hostile' is owing to the violent evacuation of members of a small Sufi sect (Abdur Rauf Group) in Batticaloa by an orthodox Muslim group. This, however, does not imply that all reformist movements in Sri Lanka are hostile (as will be exemplified in the following sections).

Islamic Reformist Movements in Sri Lanka

The Islamic reformist movements in Sri Lanka are from either South Asia (India and Pakistan) or the Middle East. The Jamaate Islami and Thablighi Jamaat, which are based in Pakistan and India respectively and arrived in Sri Lanka during the 1950s (Nuhman 2004), are the main reformist movements in the country. These reformist groups commenced their work in India and Pakistan with the aim of purifying Islam from different Hindu religious and cultural influences, establishing sharia law and forming an Islamic state in India. In fact, the Jamaate Islami played a political role in the separation of Pakistan as an Islamic state (Hansen 2000). The Thablighi Jamaat was founded by the Indian Scholar Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi in 1927 and its central office is situated in New Delhi. It has branches all over the world which are dedicated to calling on Muslims to bring their everyday life in line with Islamic principles (Gaborieau 2006; Klem 2011).

In Sri Lanka, however, the Thablighi Jamaat and Jamaate Islami movements have been underplaying their political ideology of an Islamic state and instead have adapted to the local context by focusing only on purifying Islamic practices. In this endeavor, these two movements have faced several conflicts with traditional Sufi groups. They have also played a significant role in the development of religious awareness, ethnic consciousness and cultural homogeneity among Muslims during the last few decades even though there are serious ideological differences between them (Nuhman 2004).

However, the emergence of Saudi-based movements in Sri Lanka such as the Thawheed Jamaat has transformed the conflict into Wahabism (Thawheed) versus Sufism. Thawheed Jamaat is an Islamic movement based in Saudi Arabia which follows Abdul Wahab's

theology of Islam. This group is more radical than the Thablighi Jamaat and Jamaate Islami and has provoked violence and conflict among Muslims in Sri Lanka. Thawheed Jamaat mostly attracts young Muslims who have worked in the Middle East (McGilvray 2011) and has splintered into several sub movements in Sri Lanka, the reasons for which will be discussed in detail in the sections to follow.

The Thablighi Jamaat is one of the leading revivalist movements in Sri Lanka which has networks islandwide. This non-violent religious group does not have a political agenda (Crisis Group Report, 2007) and its primary motive is to draw Muslims to the mosque for the five prayers. This is done by going door to door to Muslim houses. Their non-violent approach was corroborated through an interview with a Thablighi Jamaat leader in Saddham Hussein village[3], Eravur who emphasised that "even if the BBS attacks us, we will not go for a fight but call every Muslim to come to the mosque to pray for Allah to protect them from enemies" (Interviewee 12, personal communication, September 20, 2014). In keeping with their religiosity, the Tablighi Jamaat is very traditional in terms of dress as well. The men wear white Jubbas, white thoppis or sometimes white turbans and they also grow beards. The women are required to cover their faces and wear black shapeless gowns.

The Thablighi Jamaat's work is based in the mosque and their headquarters is called *Markas* among its members. The Thablighi Jamaat does not have a separate mosque like other revivalist movements in Sri Lanka and engages in its religious activities in any mosque that welcomes them. According to a representative of the Thablighi Jamaat, they restrict themselves from mosques (particularly Thawheed Jamaat mosques) which prohibit them to enter. Thablighis (as they are commonly known) also engage in three-day, forty-day and four-month missions preaching in mosques away from their villages with the aim of bringing Muslims to mosques. They also have a women's wing and conduct separate religious programs for Muslim women. *Ijithima* is the national level gathering of Thablighi Jamaat which is held once a year. The interviews revealed that the Thablighi Jamaat is a harmless reformist movement which follows a nonviolent approach. The Thablighi Jamaat also runs a social service unit called NIDA Foundation and its primary objective is to help those who have newly converted to Islam, but they do not have a mission to convert non-Muslims.

[3] Located in Eravur, Batticaloa, this village owes its name to gratitude for funds received from Iraq to build this village after the cyclone in 1978.

The ***Jamaate Islami*** is another reformist movement which mainly targets educated middle class Muslims (McGilvray 2011). Its chief activity has been to publish an Islamic scholarly magazine in the Tamil language called *Al Hasanath,* and is popular among educated Muslims in Sri Lanka. It has also been publishing monthly and quarterly newspapers such as *Prabodaya* and *Engal Thesam* (Our Nation) in Sinhala and Tamil respectively. This movement also arranges special religious classes for men and women separately and has a social service body which carries out different social activities such as disaster relief and Zakat (donating a portion of one's income to charity) distribution across the island.

Thawheed ideology came to Sri Lanka during the 1950s from the Middle East, was institutionalised as Thawheed Jamath and is now a leading Islamic revivalist movement in Sri Lanka. According to Nuhman (2004), the Thawheed Jamaat was founded in 1947 by Abdul Hameed Al Bakry in Paragahdeniya which is called Jammiyathu Ansari Sunnathul Muhammadiya (JASM). JASM is one of the leading Thawheed Jamaat institutes and it is the main wing of the Thawheed Jamaat. It also functions as an Arabic college and produces Muslim scholars (Moulavis) who are called Salafis. However, since the mid and late 1970s, it has splintered into numerous groups making it difficult to understand all the nuances that divide them. Groups which propagate the Thawheed ideology are present either in the form of social service organisations such as Jammiyathush SHABAB (Association of Muslim Youth of Saylan) and International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) or as Dhahwa (preaching) organisations. These Dhahwa groups are institutionalised under various names; Dharus Salaf is a Thawheed Jamaat group based in Dehiwala. There are also a few Thawheed Jamaat movements based in Kathankudy and Baticaloa such as Dharul Adhar and National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ). The All Ceylon Thawheed Jamaat (ACTJ) is another group functioning from Dematagoda, Colombo. In 2005, some of its members left this group and formed a new group which is called Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamaat (SLTJ). Many more formal (institutionalised) and informal sub-movements exist but are difficult to access.

The National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ)[4] based in Kathankudy is the most active of the Thawheed Jamath movements in the area, their primary focus being to preach against the Abdur Rauf group which is another controversial Islamic Sufi group in Sri Lanka. The NTJ

[4] The comments on the NTJ are based on the opinions/perceptions of members of other Muslim groups in Kathankudy as the researchers were unable to secure interviews with any representative of the NTJ in the area despite approaching them on several occasions.

has been very confrontational in its attack of the Abdur Rauf group, criticising their practices and teachings at public platforms, conducting public debates and distributing slanderous DVDs. Though they had not mobilised as a movement at the time, they are considered to be responsible for the violent evacuation of members of the Abdur Rauf group from Kathankudy in 2000 and 2006.

The Sri Lanka Thawheed Jamaat (SLTJ) is the most vocal of the Thawheed movements and has made several controversial public statements in recent years. Members of the SLTJ have been taken in for police investigations; they have filed several cases and made numerous statements against the BBS. The other Thawheed Jamaat and Islamic movements have been criticising and blaming the SLTJ for their rash public statements and demonstrations against the BBS and have also blamed the SLTJ for provoking tensions between the Buddhist extremists and the Muslim community.

The SLTJ has a strong link with the Tamil Nadu Thawheed Jamaat (TNTJ) and they follow TNTJ's leader, P.J. Jainulabdeen, an Islamic Scholar and authority on theological matters. The SLTJ has 63 branches all over the island and is totally opposed to any kind of Jihadi movement. According to its secretary, Mr. Razik, "We can win our goals through the democratic process" (Interview 13, Personal Communication, February 9th 2015). The SLTJ also publishes religious books and magazines and conducts religious classes for men and women separately. All the movements discussed above (except the Thablighi Jamaat and the Jamaate Islam) are Wahabist groups and engage in the purification of Islam in Sri Lanka. While they diverge on minor theological issues (reasons for which will be discussed later) they are in agreement with the belief that Muslims should follow only the Quran and Prophet Mohammed's teachings. To them, all other Sufi and Shia groups are not Muslim.

The word ***Shia*** inspires negative sentiments among the Muslim community of Sri Lanka which does not consider Shias as Muslim. Nevertheless, because Shias consider themselves Muslim, this paper includes them as well. There is a small population of Shias in Sri Lanka and a very small community in Ottamavadi Batticaloa. This group keeps to itself and is fearful of revealing its identity to other Muslims in the community due to fear of ostracism. They have their own mosque and madrasa and engage primarily in personal theological debate, publishing documents on their ideology. Colombo also has a small business community of Shias which this research paper does not focus on.

Sufis are the traditional Muslims of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Muslim identity is rooted in Sufism and orthodox Islam (de Munk 1998). In Sri Lanka Sufism has two primary orders – Tariqa and Takkia – whose followers are referred to as Tariqas and Takkias. An examination of the different Sufi orders in Sri Lanka is a study in itself and this paper does not attempt it. Instead it approaches the Sufis only as a source for rationalisation of the mandates of the new Islamic revisionist groups. The irony is that during the colonial era (just as the revisionist groups of today), Sufis saw a lack in the Muslim community and played an important role in educating the Muslims of Sri Lanka on principles of Islam and establishing an intellectual Muslim community (Shukri 1986). Even today, Tariqas and Takkiyas continue to preserve Sufi traditions and culture in Sri Lanka and their influence is particularly strong in coastal areas like Beruwala, Galle, Matara and Kalmunai (de Munk 1998).

The chief bone of contention between Sufis and the new reformist movements is shrine and saint worship, the popular shrines in Sri Lanka being the Daftar Jailani in Balangoda, Fakir Muhiyaddeen in Godapitiya and the Beach Mosuqe (Kadatkaraipalli) in Kalmunai (McGilvray 2004). In addition to this is the contestation of Sufi practices such as *Kanduri* (celebrating feasts), *Kodiyetram* (hoisting of the mosque flag) and *Maulid* celebrations (singing songs in praise of Prophet Mohamed) (McGilvray 2004; Munck 1998) which are not part of orthodox Islam, but borrowings from Hindu culture.

Like the mushrooming of new reformist movements (but at a much slower pace and lesser degree), Sufi groups also abound, particularly in Kathankudy which is a highly populated homogeneous area. In fact, it is claimed that all Islamic groups and movements are represented within its small radius and it is also said that some of the Islamic groups were born of Kathankudy soil. The ***Abdur Rauf group*** is the perfect example. Abdur Rauf is an Islamic scholar and charismatic orator who formed a new Islamic group in 1979 formally called the All Ceylon Theological Forum, but commonly referred to as the Abdur Rauf group. This group has a separate mosque in Kathankudy and all of its followers live in the area surrounding the mosque. Abrur Rauf Moulavi is treated like a god and is called *Wappa* (Father) by his followers who display his photograph in their houses. According to a representative, there are 30,000 followers (Interview 5, Personal Communication, September 19th 2014) but, based on our inquiries, the numbers are much less than this. The Abdur Rauf group is considered controversial in Kathankudy and the All Ceylon Jammiyathul Ulama (ACJU) labeled this group and their ideology as non-Muslim the same year it was

formed. Consequently, this group faced violence from the other Muslim groups in 2004 and 2006 when they were brutally driven out of the village. However, the Abdur Rauf group has managed to survive because of its good political links and the assurance that all followers will vote for whoever *Wappa* decides. The primary theological dispute between this and other Islamic groups is their worship of shrines and tombs and their belief that Allah is present in everything, even a rock, whereby a human can also be Allah (a God).

Jamaatul Muslimeen which is also known as *Baiyath* is another new Sufi group in Sri Lanka. A majority of Baiyath followers live in Eththalai, Puttalam where the ideology emerged. According to this group, a person is not born a Muslim and has to take oaths in front of an *Imam* (appointed leader) to become Muslim. Umar Ali, a leading Thawheed orator in the 1970s, is the leader of the Baiyath group. He formed this group in 1976 after visiting Pakistan in search of the 'true' Islam. Baiyath followers have taken oaths before Umar Ali and they believe that they are the 'true' Muslims and that all other Islamic groups are non-Muslim as they have not taken oaths. Another distinguishing feature of this group is that they follow some traditional practices such as not registering for identity cards or passports. At one time they did not build their houses with bricks, but lived in small tents like their Arab ancestors during the Prophet's time. Today, however, they have reverted to normal life but do not allow their womenfolk to study and force them to cover their faces. This group interacts, but does not intermarry with other Muslim groups.

The above clearly reveals that in addition to the horizontal Sufi (traditional) – Wahabi (revisionist) divide among the Muslims which can be attributed entirely to the Muslim aspiration to purify and identify with the origins of their religion, there is also a vertical divide among revisionist movements which merits exploration. This is particularly necessary to understand the splits between movements which espouse the Thawheed ideology. A representative of the SLTJ stated that the current debate among the different Thawheed groups is the issue of *Sooniyam* (charming) – whether one should believe in its powers or not. Such debates, according to him, are taking place in South Asia where public forums are held with devout Muslims challenging charmers to do harm to them in a bid to disprove the power of charming. Interestingly, Thawheeds who believe in the powers of charming are labeled 'Sooniya Thawheed' by non-believing Thawheeds as an act of excluding and othering, thus, causing a split within the movement and instigating the formation of a new one (Interview 13, Personal Communication, February 9th 2015).

While it can be acknowledged that one aspect of the reasons for intra-movement splits and conflicts can be due to theological disagreements, our research indicates that there are other worldly factors such as politics and economics which contribute towards intra-sect tensions among the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

Another distinguishing pattern of inter-movement dynamics among the Muslim community is the complex layering of ingroup and outgroup relationships in the districts of Colombo, Galle, Ampara, Batticaloa and Puttalam. On a macro level, there is ingrouping and outgrouping on the basis of fundamental Islamic principles such as *Aqeedah* (deliberate oaths of Islam) whereby non-conformist groups like the Shias and Sufi groups such as Abdur Rauf group, Bailuwan and Ahamadiyas are labelled as 'non-Muslims' or 'out of *Aqeedah*' by a majority of movements which consider themselves 'real' Muslims. These sentiments are upheld across all strata of the Muslim community from religious leaders and academics to lay persons including children. In Kathankudy, this 'othering' or 'outgrouping' of the non-conformist groups is performed both on public fora where reformist group orators vehemently ridicule and belittle the practices of these groups and in the private space of the home where families gather around the television to watch CDs (of these public debates) and laugh at the non-Muslim groups. Such deep-seated ingroup and outgroup consciousness among the Muslim community has led to hostility and even violent conflict between Reformist movements and Sufi groups. Both in 2004 and 2006, members of the Abdur Rauf group were attacked and chased out of Kathankudy by members of the Thawheed movement (Interview 5, Personal Communication, September 19th 2014). Furthermore, among a number of unreported cases, violence has also been triggered over the ownership of mosques, criticism of traditional customs like reciting *Burdha* (reciting *maulid*) and Shrine worship, sighting the crescent for the Ramazan festival, funeral rituals and hate speech.

Another feature of ingroup and outgroup consciousness, particularly in the conflict between Sufi and Wahabi groups, is the basis of identity framing processes where Sufi groups pivot their identity around the spiritual and supernatural while Wahabi movements focus on the temporal and scriptural. A distinguishing feature of non-mainstream Sufi groups like Baiyath and the Abdur Rauf group is that their identity as a credible religious group is legitimised by narratives of quests and dreams which are in keeping with the mysticism which governs their practice of Islam. Both representatives of these groups stated that their leaders went abroad in search of the 'real' Islam and in the case of the Baiyath group, found it by divine revelation

on a poster at a bus stop in Pakistan and in the case of the Abdur Rauf group confirmation through a dream in which the prophet Mohammed addressed the leader of the group (Interview 5, Personal Communication, September 19th 2014). While these narratives may capture the imagination of a relatively uneducated and socially isolated group of individuals in Etthalai (Puttalam), it is clear that the educated Abdul Rauf group leaders employ these narratives for economic and political gain. Therefore, these groups are not considered Muslim by other Sufi and Wahabi groups.

Thus, while on the macro level the conflict between Muslims is based on *Aqeedah*, on a micro level, there is conflict between most sects (accepted as within *Aqeedah*) on the basis of who the better Muslim is and who the real *Sunnat Wal Jamaat* (followers of prophet Mohamed) are. All groups and movements consider themselves as the real Muslims and *Sunnat Wal Jamaat*, and accuse each other of creating problems among the Muslim community by highlighting misinterpretations of Islam, and accusing groups of having external links with the Middle East and other countries. This has resulted in each and every group having their own mosque and conducting separate *Jumma Bayan* (Friday preaching) in their mosques or religious centres where they can convey their own ideology and message to the Muslim community. In addition, it must be mentioned (though it is not a focus of this study) that each movement and group discussed in this paper has several branches in different parts of the Island which have global links as well. Each group and movement also engages in social and community service alongside their purification efforts among Muslims and has their own social service unit as well.

The main movement at which criticism is directed is the Thawheed Jamath. Many groups and mosque federations criticise the activities of the Thawheed Jamaat for creating hostility among Muslims by preaching in an emotional tone. Thawheed Jamaat movements (particularly NTJ and SLTJ) want to effect an immediate change within the Muslim community and their urgency to do so has even led them to make compromising statements in public as well as desecrate revered Sufi shrines. This has led to instances of violent conflict instigated by the Thawheed Jamaat but perpetrated by traditional Sufi groups (Thariqas and Thakkiyas). The most brutal incident was the burning of the Masjidur Rahman, a Thawheed mosque in Beruwala, in 2008 which claimed two lives. A representative of the SLTJ also mentioned the Madampitiya mosque issue with the Jamaate Islami in 2014 which created

huge tension between the two groups resulting in stones being thrown at a Thawheed centre in Madampitiya for two hours (Interview 13, Personal Communication, February 9th 2015).

The Beruwala incident is considered a defining moment in the modern history of Muslims in Sri Lanka and referred to as a moment which "woke the community up" to the tensions within. The spokesperson of the ACJU (Interview 14, Personal Communication, March 11th 2015) stated that one had to look at the Muslims pre-Beruwela and post-Beruwela, whereby post-Beruwela they have begun to work on unifying the different Muslim groups and movements in Sri Lanka while preserving diversity. However, the SLTJ which is considered the most difficult of the radical Muslim movements expressed grievances that they were not represented in the decision making processes of the ACJU. Both groups have grievances against the other which, when objectively examined, are justifiable. The ACJU does not approve of the brash and hot-blooded nature of the SLTJ, and the SLTJ condemns the poor representation of all Muslims by the ACJU. There is a need for more dialogue and consensus between these groups to build cohesion.

The Politics of Factionalism

The Muslim political identity and stance in Sri Lankan politics too contributes to factionalism among Muslims on ethno-religious lines both at micro and macro levels. In the Batticaloa district in particular, certain Sufi groups such as the Abdur Rauf group are sustained by patronage of Muslim politicians who in turn secure a consistent voter base. This is because Sufi sects have more links with national politics than other groups due to their long history, large following and patronage of Muslim business elites. In Colombo, Alawi Moulana, Azath Saly, M.L.A.M Hisbullah and A.H.M Aswer are the strong followers of Sufism currently active in Muslim politics. Sufi elites are also more influential in the Muslim governing body – the ACJU –and their decision making process as well because of these reasons. This has caused much tension between Sufi and revisionist movements on various issues. For example, the sighting of the new moon for Ramzan festival is a crucial and controversial decision which is a major cause of conflict between Muslim movements and groups. The Sufi and Thablighi-dominant ACJU has and continues to play a significant role in deciding when the moon was sighted. Their decision, however, is being opposed by the Thawheed groups, Malharus Salam (affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) and Shias, who are politically powerless and critical of the privileges enjoyed by the groups represented in the

ACJU. On the other hand, the Thablighi and Jamaate Islami do not criticise the ACJU and follow a very neutral line in the Islamic matters of the ACJU and Sri Lanka.

In the political arena, the absence of an overarching political representative, which addresses the concerns of Muslims island-wide, could be one of the reasons for regional factionalism. The ACJU claimed that it had no political affiliations whatsoever, but engaged with Muslim politicians in encouraging them to exemplify Muslim values. Professor Uyangoda's hypothesis is that (Interview 16, Personal Communication, September 20th 2014) Muslims had lost their political leader when M.H.M Ashraff former leader and founder of the SLMC, was assassinated. This led to Muslims forming their own groups in order to safeguard their rights and reclaim their bargaining power. This is evident in the way that movements such as the Thawheed Jamath, the National Thawheed Jamath and the Thablighi Jamaat function as socio-economic and political support centres for Muslims in their districts, since political representation of these communities is lacking and because the ACJU is also considered to have no political bargaining power. This was corroborated by the media spokesman of the ACJU who said that they do not want to get involved in politics (Interview 14, Personal Communication, March 11th 2015). An example of these support centres is the new Shoora Council formed in Ottamavdi which functions, in their own words, as a "Community-based organisation" engaging in efforts to ensure good relations between the Muslim village and the adjoining Tamil village as well as dealing with issues related to accessing clean drinking water. Most of the Eastern Province Shoora councils and mosque federations also present themselves as social workers serving to fill the gap left by politicians. The newly formed National Shoora Council (NSC) and Muslim Council (MC) have also been trying to safeguard the Muslim community from external threats like BBS allegations and violence and unify the Muslim community, because Muslim politicians and political parties could not perform well / were crippled during the second part of the Rajapaksa regime. Another reason for the formation of the NSC and MC is because the ACJU could not stand up alone against the BBS's allegations and had to face much criticism from Muslim society as well. These two bodies were more active than the ACJU and Muslim politicians during the Aluthgama riots against Muslims in June 2014 and had several discussions with many stakeholders to control the violence.

It must also be stated that underlying this factionalism among the Muslim community is also the desire for power resulting in power struggles within the community. On one hand, there is

the dichotomy of the urban elite versus the (lower) middle class intelligentsia, and on the other there is the factor of age, where enterprising youth find that they are not given a space to voice dissent against their older elite leaders or engage in administration and decision making. Thus, factionalism is also instigated by power struggles within a religious community whereby breaking away from the 'father' sect (which is most often entrenched in its ways) and forming one's own sect is a means by which young Muslims acquire a voice (Interview 8, Personal Communication, September 18th 2014) A clear example is the Thawheed groups which comprise chiefly of lower middle class to middle class youth leaders and administrators.

The Economics of Factionalism

Religion is an economic subsystem of a larger social economy. "Religious economies consist of a market of current and potential followers (demand), a set of organisations (suppliers) seeking to serve the market, and the religious doctrines and practices (products) offered by various organisations" (Stark and Finke 2000, p. 35). Accordingly, the emergence of new Islamic groups and movements has to be in response to a demand for religious doctrines and practices. However, the interviews conducted reveal that rather than the demand for religious doctrines and practices, it is the ample supply of funds in Sri Lanka which triggers a demand for material gain that contributes to the increase of Islamic groups.

Philanthropy is embedded in the Quran and Hadis, and Muslim individuals and organisations are encouraged to engage in acts of charity. Thus, rich Saudi and Middle Eastern donors who consider Sri Lankan Muslims as poor brethren, donate money for the benefit of their community. Muslims are also of the belief that erecting a mosque in their lifetime is an act of merit and donate funds for this purpose. This philanthropic culture is exploited by some Sri Lankan Muslims who build mosques under the pretext of promoting Wahabist ideology just to please the Saudi donors who donate money for the promotion of Wahabism (Interview 8, Personal Communication, September 18th 2014). It is therefore, the ample availability of supply, rather than increase in demand that results in the formation of new groups and mosques. Thus, a "group is formed by first building a mosque as this helps the group to get donations" (ibid).

Secular (i.e. those who do not identify with a particular group) and traditional Muslims are very critical of the above practices. “Mosques are being opened like a boutique – an office” (Interview 8, Personal Communication, September 18th 2014). According to a Shia representative, “Islam is sold these days – it’s a business … we are against this” (Interview 2, Personal Communication, September 20th 2014). The representative of the SLTJ stated, “The bigger the mosque, the greater the profit” (Interview 13, Personal Communication, February 9th 2015). While this explains the increasing number of mosques in Sri Lanka, it also reveals the ulterior monetary motives of instituting new/sub-movements. This is further encouraged by the absence of strict state regulations restricting the erection of and number of mosques according to region (Interview 14, Personal Communication, March 11th 2015). The mushrooming of Muslim groups, from an economic perspective, is thus a capitalist enterprise which benefits Muslim individuals economically so much so that it is questionable whether the splintering of certain groups is actually based on theological disputes.

In the description of the different Muslim groups and in Table 1.1, one would have noticed that almost all new Islamic groups have a sister organisation engaged in social service work. This is also a result of the availability of funds from abroad. Again, ‘profit’ is a motive of some groups which form foreign funded NGOs which engage in social service activities building wells, mosques, donating cows for slaughtering and funding schools. On one hand, this benefits the Muslim community of Sri Lanka and on the other it is a source of wealth for those who exploit the ‘generosity’ of foreign donors. Thus, religion is also a commodity which is purchased or appropriated as a means for charismatic individuals to found religious enterprises for financial/personal gain.

The above discussion of the dynamics (religious, political and economic) of factionalism shows that Islam in Sri Lanka (like any other religious institution) is a market-driven economy which due to the absence of state regulation (as gratefully mentioned by one of the interviewees) encourages pluralism. The increasing number of intra-religious groups can be attributed to a need for the religious (Islamic) market to respond to a complex mix of ethno-nationalist, capitalist, political, religious and individual demands. On one hand, this could be considered healthy, as competition can generate higher levels of commitment among individual Islamic groups. However, too many independent competing groups can also lead to conflict (Finke and Stark, 2003).

Implications of Intra-Group Fragmentation

Having identified the reasons for factionalism, it is also important to discuss the implications of factionalism for the Muslim community of Sri Lanka as a whole. Boucek (2009), examining the different faces and dynamics of factionalism in political parties, states that factionalism can take three forms – Cooperative, Competitive and Degenerative. Cooperative factionalism is the creation of a factional structure within a party to encourage intra-party cooperation and consensus building. In contrast, competitive factionalism is the splitting of a party into opposing factions resulting from intra-party disagreements. If these parties are not regulated and monitored, it could lead to Degenerative factionalism where parties become self-seeking and vie for independent patronage (p. 469-478). While this is a very neat description of the forms of factionalism, it can contribute to explaining the complex nature of factionalism among the Muslims of Sri Lanka.

Analysis of the interviews reveals that factionalism among the Muslim community is paradoxically both competitive (as discussed above) and cooperative. Their cooperation is not intentional but due to the common minority status shared by all Muslims in Sri Lanka. Almost all the representatives of different groups emphasised this strong sense of minority identity using words such as "helpless," "isolated" and "apartheid" to describe their powerlessness in Sri Lanka.

> "We are a minority in this country … an isolated community. We don't preach because we don't like to expose ourselves. We are a minority and this country belongs to the Buddhists. Even if we are called for a fight, we won't go. We should not give fuel to the BBS" (Shia representative – Interview 2, Personal Communication, September 20th 2014)
>
> We are in Sri Lanka – a minority community. We have to co-exist and tolerate and accept others for peace" (Federation, Eravur – Interview 1, Personal Communication, September 20th, 2014)
>
> Muslims are a minority … having the lowest socio-economic base … In the South we have to compete with the Sinhalese; In the North, with the Tamils. So sometimes we come under one and sometimes two powers" (Shoora Council, Colombo – Interview 15, Personal Communication, March 19th 2015)

It is this framing of their identity as a group with minority status which is the fragile thread that holds the Muslim community of Sri Lanka together whereby all the Muslim

representatives interviewed confirmed that they would unite against a common threat. However, it must be noted that these minority sentiments do not imply that Buddhists and Tamils are the Muslims' only religious or ethnic 'Other'. In fact, the Muslims' 'Other' varies according to where and whether they are densely concentrated. Thus, the Eravur Federation states, "Muslims cause problems in Kathankudi and not in other places like Badulla and Batticaloa where they are a minority" (Interview 1, Personal Communication, September 20th, 2014). In other words, at a macro level, the Muslim identity is defined by the Sinhalese and Tamil majority which fosters unity, while at a micro level it is conflicted and pitted against its various groups (i.e. sufism / wahabism and intra-Thawheed conflicts).

This competitive factionalism is healthy on one hand, because it encourages checks and balances within the Muslim community, not merely with regard to the learning of theology, but also with regard to encouraging inclusiveness within governing bodies such as the ACJU. The ACJU claims to represent all Muslim groups in Sri Lanka and ensure unity in representation to the other religious and ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. However, they seem to have disowned the SLTJ which chooses not to conform, and this is one of the chief reasons for degenerative tendencies within the Muslim community. The representative of the ACJU implied that on the basis of theology, Muslims had the right to have differences of opinion and that as long as the fundamentals of Islam were accepted (Quran and Hadis) they were considered Muslim. Thus, there is co-existence among Muslims to a large extent on the basis of religion. It is the modes and methods used by dissenting Islamic movements like the Thawheed movements (SLTJ and NTJ) which tarnish the reputation of Muslims which is not tolerated by the ACJU. However, the ACJU needs to realise that they have to engage with 'degenerate' Thawheed movements and include them in democratic decision-making processes in order to avoid conflict. This is not an easy task as the Thawheed representatives demonstrated an unswerving hold over their beliefs.

With regard to degenerative factionalism, the researchers also investigated the accusation made both within and outside the Muslim community that a Jihadist Movement was emerging in the East. On interviewing several Thablighi, Thawheed and Sufi representatives, it was found that while there is talk among discontented youth about espousing jihadi practices, these are just idle youth responding to the global trend in Islam, but with no motivation or the means to make this a reality. Local organisations such as mosque federations are also keeping tabs on the community and nipping such ideas in the bud. The

ACJU, Shoora Council and local Mosque Federations confirmed that there are no Islamic Jihadi groups in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The emergence of new Islamic movements is an ongoing and continuous process and a sign that Islam in Sri Lanka is a healthy social movement which keeps abreast of trends within the Global Ummah while tolerating diversity. This is also encouraged by the democratic liberties provided in the constitution of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the increase in religiosity of Muslims of Sri Lanka and the attendant visibility in the form of mosques and traditional dress should not be considered as a threat to Buddhism and the national security of Sri Lanka. In fact, Sri Lankan Muslims are highly conscious of how they are perceived by their ethnic others and are engaging in dialogue on Islamaphobia and inter-religious harmony.

Factionalism is also a sign that Muslims are deeply introspective about their identity and religiosity whereby the movements they form are driven not only by material gains, but also by the need to protect their version of Islam. Factionalism among the Muslim community of Sri Lanka is also competitively cooperative, with the All Ceylon Jamiyathul Ulama, National Shoora Council and Muslim Council working towards amicable relations and corporation between the different Muslim groups. There is only one delinquent outlier which poses a threat to the Muslim community, but it must be noted that this group too has legitimate grievances which points out many shortcomings of these traditional, elite-run governing bodies. Their methods might be questionable, but their criticism and ideas are valid and worth taking into consideration.

The recommendation made in this paper is for more effective dialogue between disagreeing groups and an increase in inclusivity and democracy in internal decision making processes within National Muslim Bodies. The researchers also hope that this paper generates discussion within the Muslim community and invites responses to the arguments made in the paper.

References

Ameerdeen, V, (2006), *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka,* Kandy: Centre for Minority Studies.

Bayat, A, (2005), 'Islamism and Social Movement Theory, *Third World Quarterly.'* Vol. 26(6), pp. 891-906.

Boucek, F, (2009), 'Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and the Three Faces of Factionalism', *Party Politics*, Vol. 15(4), pp. 455-485.

Davis, G. F. et al., (2005), *Social Movement and Organisational Theory,* New York: Cambridge University Press.

de Munck, C, (1998), 'Sufi and Reformist Designs: Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka', In, Bartholomeusz, T.J and, de Silva, C.R, (ed), *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka,* New York: State University of New York Press.

Finke, R and Stark, R, (2003), 'The Dynamics of Religious Institutions', In Dillon, M (ed), *The Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gaborieau, M, (2006), Archives de sciences sociales des religions, Réveils du soufisme en Afrique et en Asie: Translocalité prosélytisme et réforme, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30122870, accessed on 20/02/2015.

Gombrich, R and Obeysekere, G, (1990), *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Delhi; Princeton University Press.

Haniffa, F, (2003). 'Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka,' In Osella, F and Osella, C (eds), *Islamic Reform in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Hansen, T.B, (2000). 'Predicaments of Secularism: Muslim Identities and Politics in Mumbai.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Vol. 6(2), pp 255-272.

Jhingran, S, (1996), 'Religion and Communalism', In, Bidwai, P, Mukhia, H, Vanaik, A, *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism,* New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Klem, B, (2011), 'Islam, Politics and Violence in Eastern Sri Lanka' *Journal of South Asian Studies,* Vol. 70(3), pp. 730 – 753.

McGilvray, D.B, (2011), 'Sri Lankan Muslims: Between Ethno-Nationalism and the Global Ummah', *Nations and Nationalism,* Vol. 17 (1), pp. 45-64.

---, (2008), *Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka,* Durham & London: Duke University Press.

---, (2004), 'Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka', In, Ahmad, I, and Reinfeld, (ed), *Lived Islam in South Asia,* New Delhi: Social Science Press.

Mohan, R.V, (1987), *Identity Crisis of Sri Lankan Muslim,* New Delhi: Mital Publications.

Nuhman, M.A, (2004), *Understanding Sri Lankan Muslim Identity,* Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

---, (2007), *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Peek, L, (2005), 'Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity'. *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 66(3), pp. 215-242.

Samraweera, V, (1986), 'Aspects of Muslim Revivalist Movements' In, Shukri, M.A.M, (ed), *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity,* Beruwala: Jamiyah Naleemiyah Institute.

Shukri, M.A.M, (1986), 'Muslims of Sri Lanka - Cultural Perspective' In, Shukri, M.A.M,(ed), *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity,* Beruwala: Jamiyah Naleemiyah Institute.

Spencer, R, Pryce, J.M. and Walsh, J, (2014), 'Philosophical Approaches to Qualitative Research' In Leavy, P, (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 81-98.

Spencer, J et al., (2015). *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque: A Collaborative Ethnography of War and Peace*. Colombo: SSA.

Stark, R & Roger Finke (2000). *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fracturing Community:
Intra-group relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka

Ethno-religious violence has a long history in Sri Lanka dating far back as 1883. The Muslims of Sri Lanka have been victims of sporadic attacks by the Sinhalese and Tamil majorities since the early 1900s with the most recent attack being in 2014. While the recent turn towards violence against the Muslim community in Sri Lanka can be attributed to the "ethno-nationalist rivalries" (McGilvray 2011) of the Sinhala Buddhist (political) majority of Sri Lanka, this paper hypothesises that anti-Muslim sentiments are also a result of the internal conflicts regarding the practice of Islam within the Muslim community. These conflicts, manifested in the form of visible, symbolic Islamisation, cause suspicion and fear among members of other communities.

This study examines intra-religious relations within the Muslim community of Sri Lanka by identifying the different Islamic groups, their composition, motivations and interactions through the lens of social movement theory.

Mohamed Faslan and **Nadine Vanniasinkam** are Programme Officers at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies

ISBN 978-955-580-169-0